


CAMPAIGN PORTRAITS

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CAMPAIGN - 1860

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# Abraham Lincoln's Political Career through 1860

## Campaign Portraits

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection







# Lincoln Lore

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

October, 1979

Bulletin of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor.  
Mary Jane Hubler, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the  
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Number 1700

## THE LAST LIFE PORTRAIT OF LINCOLN

While Boston authorities were attempting last spring to embargo the removal of Gilbert Stuart's famous paintings of George and Martha Washington, the last portrait of Lincoln painted from life quietly left Boston for Fort Wayne. The Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum—thanks to a special appropriation from its governing body, the Lincoln National Life Foundation, Inc.—now houses Matthew Wilson's portrait of Lincoln painted from life and dated April, 1865, the month of the President's assassination. Gideon Welles, Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy, commissioned the portrait, and important contemporary witnesses testified to the remarkable quality of the likeness.

Matthew Henry Wilson was born in England in 1814. When he was seventeen, he emigrated to America to engage in the business of silk manufacture, only to find upon his arrival that no such industry existed in the United States. Hard times followed, as Wilson tried to make ends meet by tuning pianos and teaching school. His first portrait was a painted sketch of himself he made to send to his mother. The residents of his boarding house were so taken with the likeness that he decided to try painting portraits for a living. His first sitter paid him \$2.00 for his portrait.

Wilson studied with Philadelphia painter Henry Inman from 1832 to 1835 and then went to Paris to study with Edouard Dubufe. He returned to America two years later and painted in Brooklyn, New Orleans, Baltimore, and other places before settling in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1856. He worked in the Boston-Hartford area and met Welles, a Hartford resident, in 1859. He painted portraits of the Welles family and of numerous members of

the Connecticut commercial elite. Patrons now paid \$100 for a Wilson portrait. By the end of the Civil War, Wilson charged \$150 for a portrait.

On February 4, 1865, Mrs. Welles introduced Wilson to the President, apparently in order to make arrangements to paint his portrait. The next day, he met Lincoln at Alexander Gardner's photographic studio to have photographs made on which to base the portrait. The famous group of photographs that resulted from this last photographic sitting included the only Lincoln photographs with a hint of a smile on his face. After a day passed, probably spent waiting for Gardner's gallery to develop the photographs, Wilson started painting Lincoln's portrait. He painted all day on the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th.

Wilson worked on the Lincoln painting on the 14th and 15th, and then he tried to see the President in order to put on the finishing touches. A Cabinet meeting prevented him from doing so on the 17th, but he saw Lincoln the next day. On the 20th, he returned to the White House and painted there.

Wilson finished the portrait by February 22, 1865. As Francis B. Carpenter, another artist fortunate enough to have Lincoln sit for him, records it, on that day Lincoln was in a good mood:

Temporarily upon the wall of the room [Lincoln's office] was a portrait of himself recently painted for Secretary Welles by a Connecticut artist friend. Turning to the picture, Mr. Welles remarked that he thought it a successful likeness. "Yes," returned the President, hesitatingly; and then came a story of a western friend whose wife pronounced her husband's portrait, painted secretly for a birthday present,



*From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum*

**FIGURE 1.** Matthew Wilson's portrait of Lincoln is an oil painting on oval artist's board, 16 7/8" x 13 7/8". The frame, apparently the original, measures 27 5/8" x 24 1/2". It is in excellent condition.



"horridly like;" "and that," said he, "seems to me a just criticism of *this*!"

Lincoln was notoriously modest about his physical appearance. Welles was pleased with the portrait. He must have been pleased with the price, too. Wilson charged him only \$85. Welles wrote the artist a check for that amount on April 12th.

Wilson had no way of knowing it, but he painted the President's likeness at the last possible moment. Three days after the check was written, the President was dead. Immediately, Louis Prang of Boston, a lithographer, wanted a copy of the portrait on which to base a print portrait. On April 20th, Wilson began painting a copy for Prang. Before the year was over, Wilson painted at least three copies, perhaps four or five.

The demand for copies shows that the portrait was successful. And the names of those who asked for copies provide even firmer proof that this was not just another portrait from life but also an excellent likeness. Wilson painted one copy for Welles, who wanted a copy to hang permanently in the Navy Department. He made a copy for Joshua Speed, Lincoln's most intimate friend in the days of his early manhood. Wilson provided still another copy for John Forney, a prominent Republican newspaperman in Philadelphia and Washington and a close political associate of Lincoln's during the Civil War. He may have made another copy for Mrs. Welles, who wanted one for a New Year's Day party in 1866.

Sorting out the subsequent history of the various portraits is no easy business. Maury Bromsen, the prominent dealer and collector from whom the Lincoln Library and Museum procured the painting, worked for years to establish the history of this portrait. Although some questions remain unanswered, it is clear that the copy hanging in the J.B. Speed Art Museum in Louisville, Kentucky, is the copy made for Joshua Speed. Likewise, the Navy Department still retains the copy Welles had made for that purpose. One other copy of the painting is known; it hangs in Philipse Manor Hall in Yonkers, New York.

Both the Philipse Manor Hall copy and the copy in the Lincoln Library and Museum are signed, the former in red, the latter in black. The other two copies are unsigned and are known to be copies of the original. How

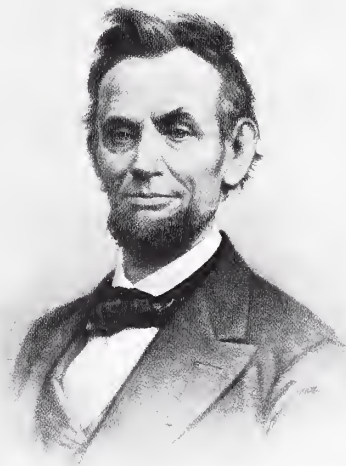
can one be sure the Lincoln Library and Museum portrait is the original painting? First, it is the only version of the portrait which is dated. The date is April, 1865, and Wilson completed the original portrait in that month (note the date of Gideon Welles's check). Wilson began painting the copy for Prang late in April. He was apparently still painting it in May, for his diary states that he worked on the copy steadily from April 20th through May 2nd. On May 16th, Wilson noted that he was painting *two* copies of the Lincoln. This is the first mention of another copy and is proof that the May 2nd entry, "Painted on Mr. Lincoln," still refers to the Prang copy. Wilson finished no copy in April.

A complicating factor in tracing the history of the painting is that Charles Henry Hart, an enterprising Lincoln collector and sometime art dealer, owned two versions himself. In a 1911 newspaper article boasting of the quality of the version he owned at that time, Hart said that Wilson signed it in red to distinguish it as the original and best version. This, then, is the Philipse Manor Hall portrait, but it is not the original. Alice Brainerd Welles sold the Welles family's portrait to Hart in 1915. She sent a letter with it saying that the portrait she was selling had belonged to her grandfather, Gideon Welles; to her father, Edgar T. Welles; and then to her by inheritance in 1914. Hart owned the original portrait, but it was the second one he acquired. The first, of which he boasted so much,

was a copy—not the original, not the only signed copy, and not so designated by the artist in any way.

A further distinguishing feature of the recently acquired portrait is the fact that it is an oil on board. The other three extant copies are painted on canvas.

The staff of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum is grateful to the Lincoln National Life Foundation, Inc., which immediately upon hearing that this important portrait was available provided generous funding. The staff is grateful too for Mr. Bromsen's making the painting available and supplying copies of all his correspondence and research notes on the painting. Finally, it is grateful to Matthew Wilson, who captured the spirit of Lincoln's last days as no other artist ever has. One can see the hint of merri-ment in Lincoln's face, the first sign that the great burden of the war was, with Grant's victories, growing ever lighter.

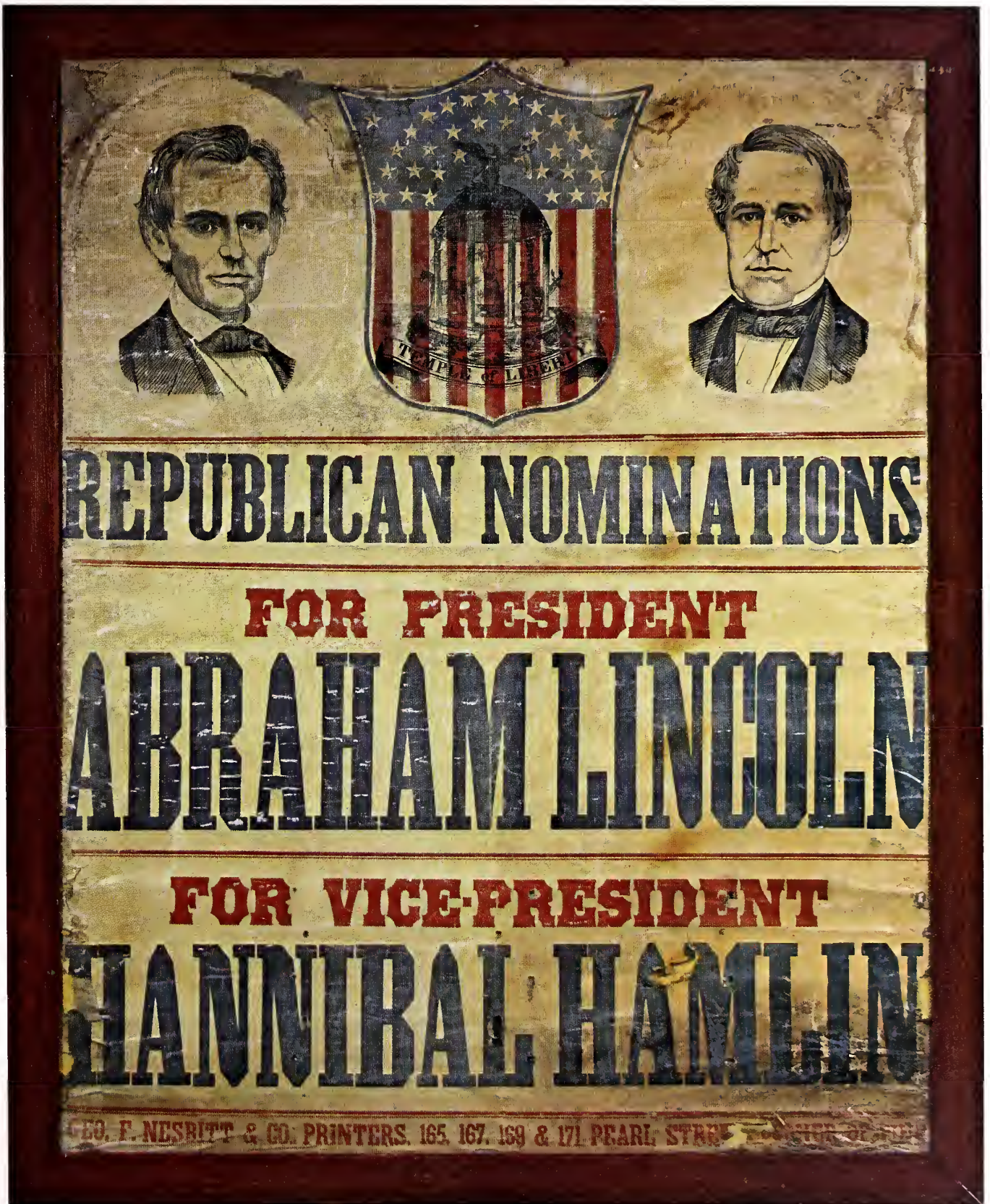


From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

**FIGURE 2.** Famed for chromolithography, L. Prang & Co., Boston, Massachusetts, based this lithograph of Lincoln on Wilson's painting. Surely, no one commenced work on a new picture of the assassinated President more quickly than Prang.



## OTHER RECENT ACQUISITIONS



*From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum*

FIGURE 3. Political banners of the 1860s are rare, and banners from the 1860 campaign are apparently even scarcer than those from 1864. Doubtless frugal wives turned many a political banner into rags. Last year the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum added the first two examples of cloth political banners to its collection.



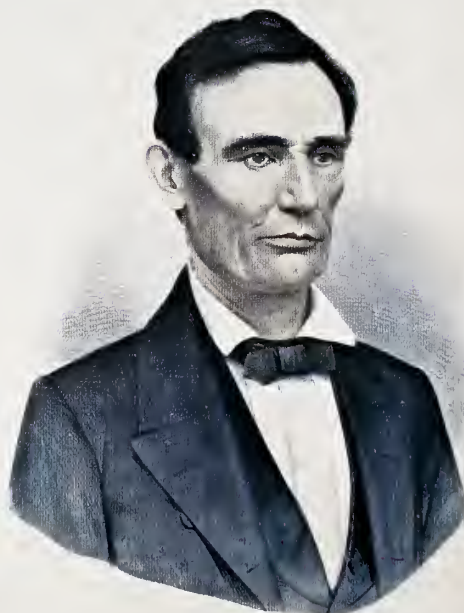


FIGURE 4. In 1964, R. Gerald McMurtry described the Manny reaper in the June issue of *Lincoln Lore*. He had recently helped collector Philip D. Sang obtain a manufacturer's model of this famous reaper, which was a competitor in the market and in the courtroom with the McCormick reaper. Mr. Sang's widow remembered Dr. McMurtry's good offices and recently allowed the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum to acquire the model. For the first time in history, this beautiful model (in perfect working order) is on public display.

From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

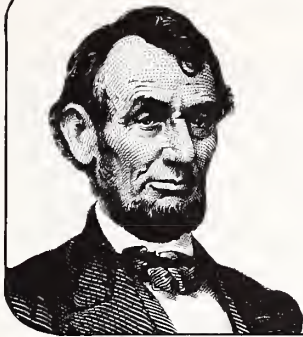
FIGURE 5. Like most other producers of campaign portraits for the 1860 election, Currier & Ives favored the portrait of Lincoln taken by Mathew Brady on February 27, 1860, while Lincoln was in New York City to make his famed Cooper Institute Address. As a statesmanlike photograph, it had not been exceeded by any likeness made by the time of the Republican nomination. Since Brady made the photograph, it was readily available to lithographers and engravers in the East.

Currier & Ives also obtained a copy of an earlier Lincoln photograph, probably taken by Roderick M. Cole in Peoria in 1858. The Republican candidate appeared considerably gaunter and generally less distinguished in this Western portrait. Nevertheless, Currier & Ives based "Our Next President" on it as well as "The Republican Banner for 1860," a campaign lithograph which showed both Lincoln and Hamlin. The portrait was widely used for tintypes, ferrotypes, and other campaign ephemera, but the Currier & Ives print is rather rare. The Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum acquired a copy of "Our Next President" only this year.



From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum





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Mary Jane Hubler, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the  
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Number 1710

## BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE Lincoln in Graphic Art, 1860-1865

The Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum is sponsoring an exhibit of popular prints of Abraham Lincoln in the Cannon Office Building of the House of Representatives in February and March of 1981. The exhibit, nestled in the arches of the handsome rotunda of the Cannon Building, is open to the public and free of charge. The customary traffic in this building consists of people who are themselves politicians, who work for politicians, or who call on politicians, and the exhibit naturally focuses on Lincoln's political image.

The heyday of public relations and propaganda arrived only with the First World War, and America's nineteenth-century Presidents had little awareness of the powers of conscious image-making. The Lincoln administration, which at its height had a White House staff of three secretaries, employed none of the elaborate apparatus of modern image-conscious politicians. Imagery was the province of, among others, the popular printmakers of the day.

Abraham Lincoln and the graphic arts in America grew up together. Neither took much notice of the other until 1860, when Lincoln became the Republican nominee for President. Suddenly the Republican party needed pictures of him for campaign posters, and the voters wanted to know what he looked like. Lincoln's looks were an issue well before most people had seen a picture of him, for it was widely rumored that he was ugly. Lincoln was genuinely modest about his looks, and he took notice of the graphic arts only when they were forced upon his attention. He rarely commented on the various portraits of him produced after he became a national political figure. He confessed that he knew "nothing" of such matters, that he had an "unpracticed eye," and that he was, in truth, "a very indifferent judge" of the artistic merits of efforts to capture his likeness.

Lincoln's Presidential nomination in 1860 surprised nearly everyone. The first mass-produced likeness of him, an engraving by F. H. Brown of Chicago, appeared only at the nominating convention itself. Lincoln had been so seldom photographed before 1860 that

the printmaker had to copy his likeness from a photograph taken in Chicago in 1857, a photograph noted for the disorderly appearance of Lincoln's hair. Printmakers needed more photographs of the candidate and more gentlemanly poses. Numerous sittings for photographers and for painters with commissions from Republican patrons demanding that they make the candidate "good looking whether the original would justify it or not" soon solved the problem of models from which the printmakers could work, and the great process of Presidential image-making began.

Popular prints relied on sentimentalism, sensationalism, and satire. Sensational pictures of fires and other disasters had helped make lithography a growth industry in the 1840s, and, during Lincoln's Presidency, the printmakers would capitalize on battle scenes to continue this form of appeal. Sentimentalism, however, was the dominant motif of popular prints, just as it dominated popular literature. Politics lent

themselves more to satire than sentiment, and Presidential campaigns always boosted the cartoon industry. In the end, nevertheless, sentimentalism triumphed — a victory so complete that the political cartoons of Lincoln still appear a little strange to us.

They appear strange, too, because the nature of the art of political cartooning was quite different in Lincoln's era from that of today. For one thing, cartoons were a part of the print business. Most were poster cartoons issued as separate prints by firms like Currier & Ives, more famous today for nostalgic landscapes and sentimental genre pictures. These firms put business ahead of politics and produced both pro- and anti-Lincoln cartoons. Sometimes the same artist produced cartoons on both sides of a political question. Louis Maurer (1832-1932) drew both "Honest Abe Taking Them on the Half Shell," predicting that Lincoln would gobble up the Democratic politicians grown fat from their long years in office, and "The Rail Candidate," one of the better anti-Lincoln cartoons of the campaign. Another difference from modern political art is that cartoonists did not go in for



ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. How the people first saw Lincoln.



**FIGURE 2. Louis Maurer guessed at Lincoln's grin.**

caricature, which dominates modern political cartoons. Instead of exaggerating physical features which characterized a politician's face, they copied the faces slavishly from available photographs. Maurer's "Honest Abe" is adventuresome in attempting to depict Lincoln's smile. Lincoln never smiled in his photographs, and to this day no one knows what his teeth looked like. Humor usually stemmed only from the improbable situations in which the cartoonists placed the politicians or from balloons of language, often filled with obscure puns.

The political cartoons of Lincoln's day were not forward-looking in terms of method. They are, therefore, all the better as documents of the social and political beliefs of that era. They are cluttered with figures and words, and the social stereotypes in the backgrounds of the cartoons are a vivid index of the lowest common denominator of public opinion.

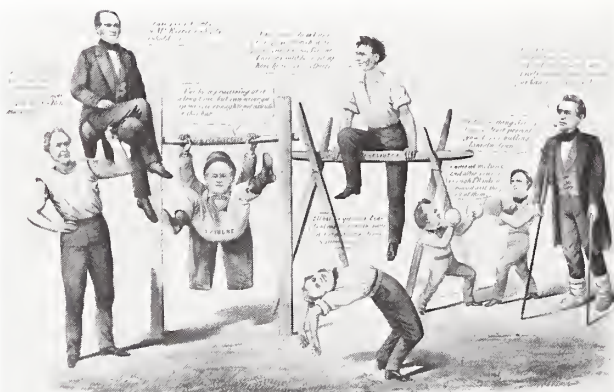
In 1860 the cartoonists, their pens ready to attack William H. Seward, the front-runner for the Republican nomination, were as astonished as most American voters were at Lincoln's nomination. Like the voters, they knew almost nothing about him. They seized with alacrity on the few available scraps of colorful information about Lincoln. Republicans touted Lincoln as the "Railsplitter," and a rail became essential in Lincoln cartoons. He was often depicted in a workman's blouse rather than the customary coat and tie of most candidates, but, no matter the attire, he almost always had a rail handy. He might use his rail to fend off candidates trying to break into the White House; he might exercise on it; or he might use it to drive the wildcat of sectional discord back into the Republican bag.



**FIGURE 3. Maurer put the anti-Lincoln elements together in their simplest form.**



**STORMING THE CASTLE**  
OLD ABE ON LEAD.



**THE POLITICAL GYMNASIUM.**



**LETTING THE CAT OUT OF THE BAG!!**

From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

**FIGURE 4. Railing at the candidate.**

The standard anti-Lincoln cartoon in 1860 contained four elements: Lincoln, a rail, Horace Greeley, and a black man. Greeley was a cartoonist's delight, almost a self-caricature. The moon-faced outspoken reformer wore a long white duster, its pockets crammed with pamphlets and papers. Over the years, Greeley had flirted with a myriad of reforms, some of them quite radical, and he came to symbolize the crank reformer on the enthusiastic lunatic fringe of the Republican party. His presence in the cartoons was a reminder of the allegedly dangerous and radical impulses in the Republican party.

One need not look long at political cartoons in Lincoln's era to see evidence of the pervasive racism of nineteenth-century American popular opinion. The presence of black men, women, girls, boys, and babies in Lincoln cartoons was meant





From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

**FIGURE 5. Adalbert Volck was among the best.**

to stand as a warning of the racial results of Republican anti-slavery policies.

Lincoln was so little known that cartoonists assumed he was a nonentity who would dance to the tune of more powerful figures in the Republican party. Often, he was not even the central figure in their busy cartoons, and Lincoln's failure to take over the central spot in these cartoons is an unconscious sign of the artists' inability to take him seriously. What seemed serious was the threat that the reform impulse represented by Greeley and the Negro might at last seize control of the country on the coattails of this unobjectionable but innocuous candidate.

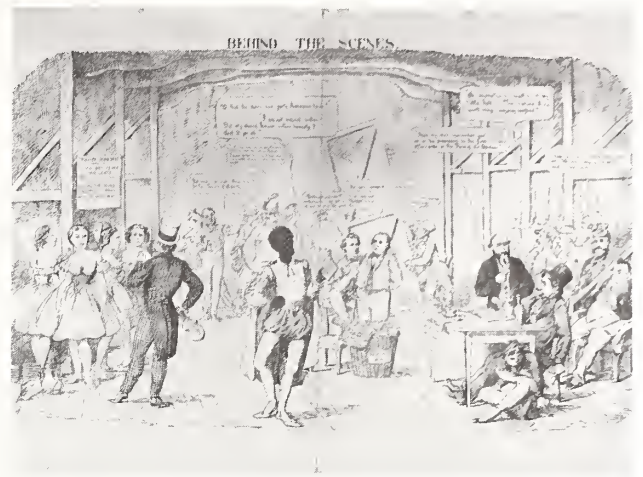
The greatest satirical talent in American graphic art in Lincoln's day was located in the camp of the opposition. Adalbert Johann Volck (1828-1912) was a Baltimore dentist who had come to the United States from Bavaria. He probably received some training in the graphic arts in Europe, as did many other American artists in Lincoln's day, but Baltimore shaped his political opinions. Maryland, though it did not secede, was a slave state, and opposition to the Republican party in the state was virulent. Volck was decidedly pro-Southern and loathed the Lincoln administration.

Volck's considerable technical skills as an etcher were united with a sharp satirical eye. In one of the most brilliantly conceived and skillfully executed prints of the period, Volck pictured Lincoln as a hopelessly idealistic Don Quixote, carrying a John Brown pike instead of a lance, accompanied by that sordid reminder of Northern materialism, Benjamin



From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

**FIGURE 6. Literary allusions were common.**



From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

**FIGURE 7. Benjamin Butler is Falstaff.**

F. Butler, as Sancho Panza, complete with stolen Southern cutlery in his belt. Volck's cartoons also played on fevered fears of doom for the white race if the North were victorious in the Civil War.

Volck's work is sometimes carelessly thought of as Confederate cartoons, the only vigorous Southern counterpart of Thomas Nast's pro-Republican cartoons in the North. In truth, Nast was very young and not particularly active during the Civil War, and Volck's satirical etchings were really Copperhead cartoons, the product of anti-Lincoln sentiment in the North. Volck was apparently never arrested for producing the prints nor for his more treasonous activities like smuggling spies and medicines to the Confederacy. His art stands as a visual embodiment of the political atmosphere which led a group of Maryland men (and one D. C. pharmacist's assistant) eventually to murder President Lincoln. John Wilkes Booth, a Maryland native, led the group.

By 1864 printmakers knew more about Lincoln, and their work during his bid for reelection seized on some entirely new themes. The rail was gone, and no single symbol so dominated cartoons as it had done four years earlier. Its nearest competitor was Lincoln's reputation for telling jokes. This quality endears him to twentieth-century Americans, but it was less clearly a political asset in Lincoln's earnest Victorian era. Cartoonists frequently attacked him as a mere frontier joker — too small for the job of President.

Two of the better cartoons of the 1864 campaign capitalized on Lincoln's reputation as a lover of Shakespeare's works. J. H. Howard depicted Lincoln's Democratic rival for the Presidency, George B. McClellan, as Hamlet, holding the



From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

**FIGURE 8. A crowded but effective cartoon.**





From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

**FIGURE 9. A cartoon for the ugly mood of 1864.**

skull of Lincoln as Yorick and asking, "Where be your gibes now?" Thus the artist combined his knowledge of Lincoln's reputation for joking and for reading Shakespeare's works. Another cartoonist moved away from merely associating Lincoln with black people to turning Lincoln into a black man himself. Shakespeare provided the artful mechanism for doing so: the cartoonist depicted Lincoln as Othello. This print lacked the simplicity of conception of Howard's cartoon, but the crowded stage contained other figures who symbolized controversial acts of the Lincoln administration. Secretary of State Seward, seated at Lincoln's left, had once been in charge of arrests of disloyal persons in the North. Rumor had it that Seward had once boasted to the English ambassador that he could ring a little bell and cause the arrest of anyone in the United States.

The story about Seward was doubtless untrue, but its fame was revealing of the anxiety aroused by the suspension of some traditional American liberties in the North during the Civil War. The Democrats were bereft of their traditional

appeals to economic discontent by high wartime employment. Lincoln frustrated some of their appeals to racism by claiming that the Emancipation Proclamation was essential to provide the man power necessary to win the war. The issue of civil liberties was about the only one left in the Democratic arsenal. "The Grave of the Union" added to the traditional figures of Lincoln, Greeley, and a black baby (under Henry Ward Beecher's arm), portraits of those "War Democrats" who served the Lincoln administration, most notably the driver of the hearse, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton.

Lincoln's reputation for humor did not prevent the creation of sinister images of the President. The story that Lincoln had asked his friend Ward Hill Lamon to sing a vulgar and humorous tune on a visit to the Antietam battlefield led to one of the most darkly effective anti-Lincoln cartoons of the Civil War. In truth, Lincoln asked for the tune to cheer him up after the gloomy visit. He was miles from the battlefield when the event occurred. All the bodies on the field had been buried long ago. The spurious charge was so effective, however, that Lincoln prepared a long letter for the press explaining the event. In the end, he decided not to issue it, and the story was not effectively scotched until 1895 when Lamon published a facsimile of Lincoln's letter in his *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, 1847-1865*.

The Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation brought rapid (and, unfortunately, temporary) changes in the customary depiction of black people in popular art. "Union and Liberty! And Union and Slavery!" contained the common message of Republican cartoons that McClellan's election was tantamount to a victory for Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy. It also contained in the background an unusual depiction of racial harmony, as white and black children emerged from a school. Such an image was unthinkable four years earlier.

This issue of *Lincoln Lore* has focused principally on the satirical vein in popular prints of Lincoln. There was a sentimental counterattack, and the next issue will focus on those prints in the exhibit which made Lincoln's image what it is today. In the meantime, if you happen to be in the Washington area, please drop by the Cannon Office Building to view "BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE: Lincoln in Graphic Art, 1860-1865."



From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

**FIGURE 10. This appeal to the white workingman contains an unusual vision of racial harmony.**



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